

Fest from page A1

taking a walk over much-smoother terrain, Stark and Watts addressed several bumps in the road for the new regime of the festival, notably how some merchants expressed displeasure over not being included in previous decisions. Those included the following:

- When the festival takes place. It is slated for June 22-24 this year, instead of in mid-July, with the date change largely meant to minimize direct competition against other similar extravaganzas and maximize opportunities to draw the better fine arts crafters.

- To that end, one of the suggestions being seriously considered is to conduct a "juried" quality-control check to make sure crafters are top-notch and made their own goods rather than buying them in stores and putting them on display. Stark said Park is a likely venue for fine arts crafters. "We want crafters, but we don't want just any crafters," Watts said.

- Changing the event's name from founders festival to family fest, which Stark said was done to "better reflect where we are in 2000 and beyond" and to celebrate the fact that families are essential to Farmington and Farmington Hills.

- "Our niche ... is the family," Stark said.

- Assessing merchants a \$50 fee for the right to display merchandise in front of stores.

The general displeasure prompted the recent resurrection of the Downtown Farmington Merchants Association, which had several members at Wednesday's meeting. Displeasure also led to finger pointing, some of it beginning during the 1999 festival, and an attitude among some that things always done a particular way were suddenly changing too fast for their liking.

"The only people who are going to make this happen are those of you in this room," Stark said, tacking on various civic service clubs as another prime source of positive action. "... There is no 'they,' there's only us. We are the festival."

Over the past few weeks, any gap in information began to be

New happenings planned

Following are some of the new possible twists planned for the Farmington Area Family Fest.

- Free shuttle service from Farmington Flight School to the downtown area.
- Children's activities added into the three-day event, perhaps at Shiloh Park.

- More entertainment variety, with swing and jazz bands.
- A better mix of crafters and food vendors.
- A more wide-open set-up in the Downtown Farmington Center, where the traditional yellow circus tent no longer will dominate.
- Maybe even a classic car display for antique buffs.

bridged when Stark answered a list of 12 pertinent questions posed by members of the merchants association. Wednesday's meeting continued the discussion.

Prior to the meeting, Farmington City Manager Frank Lauff, also on the FAFF board, conceded that "obviously, we didn't do a good enough job of (communicating) in the beginning. We want to back up and make sure everybody who is directly impacted is involved. ... This is an inclusive effort to make this festival better. And we need each one of them to participate."

Stark also explained why the festival needs to be viewed as a business for it to last. Before 1999, the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce championed the cause, often underwriting costs to organize it. When it became too much of a burden for the chamber, it started looking for a festival safety net in 1997; two years later, Watts-Up! was hired to take over.

"We have to balance out on the bottom line," emphasized Stark. "That's one cold, hard fact we all have to realize. We need to look at this event with business eyes as well as community eyes."

Stark and Watts had to field several questions from one crafters' group, being charged an extra fee on top of what they are required to pay for a spot at

will be charged \$300 and \$150, respectively, to set up booths at the Downtown Farmington Center.

Meanwhile, the previously protested \$50 sidewalk display fee, and \$50 fees being tacked on booths either at the privately owned Masonic Temple or First United Methodist Church, are to meet expenses for essentials such as festival insurance and media promotions. One of the festival board's goals is to draw people from outside Farmington and Farmington Hills, not only to enjoy the festivities but to discover the various retail shops in the area.

"We're not just an event firm, we do marketing," said Watts, who runs Watts-Up! with his wife, Sandra, also present at the meeting. "We'll include you in the PR wire that goes across the state."

Stark and Watts had to field several questions from one crafters' group, being charged an extra fee on top of what they are required to pay for a spot at

First Methodist or Masonic Temple - \$80 or \$100, respectively, in 1999.

"The decision was made that everybody who benefits from the festival should put something back into it," Stark said. "That's a fact of business."

Added Watts, "People are used to the old way. But people have to take the responsibility on themselves."

Be patient

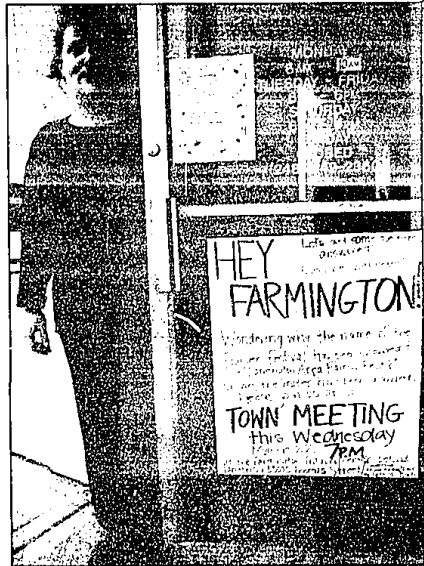
Merchants and crafters were asked to show patience, and give Watts some time before judging his work. He said his efforts have helped lift the Plymouth International Ice Festival to unprecedented heights, and he has similar hopes for Farmington's showcase.

And, referring to last year, Watts said all he could do was follow the established formula and merely ensure that a festival took place. "We don't feel last year's festival was a Watts-Up! production."

"Hopefully, he continued, people will start to see some noticeable improvements with the 2000 festival.

That means upgrades in the quality of vendors and crafters, and a move away from the usual carnival-like food and entertainment offerings of the past. Although family fun won't be obsolete - in keeping with the new name - it won't be business as usual.

"People have done the same thing over and over again," Watts said. "After seven, eight or 10 years, people don't want to see the Teen Angels, who play at 10 p.m. on Saturday night. Same



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BARKER
Come one, come all: Becky Burns advertised the meeting in the door of her business, The Farmington Bakery.

thing with the food."

After the meeting both Watson and Sallen said they felt even better about shelling out the \$50 sidewalk fee, especially because a chunk of it will go toward festi-

val promotions.

"We don't mind putting in any kind of fee they may need, within reason," Watson said. "But we wanted to see what we were going to get for it."

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